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AUTHOR Abbott, Eric A.
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ABSTRACT

Despite their important role in the community, there have been a number of economic cycles and population shifts which have resulted in rural communities losing their weekly newspapers. An exploratory case study examined a small Iowa community of 450 persons which launched a volunteer newspaper nearly 10 years ago. The experiences of this community are seen as a possible model for other small communities which desire a newspaper, but are too small to support a commercial weekly newspaper. The study was divided into two main parts. The first part, using a series of interviews with persons instrumental in creating and operating the volunteer newspaper, was aimed at explaining how the newspaper came into existence and how it had survived its first decade. The second part consisted of a mail survey of all 427 subscribers to the volunteer newspaper. Results indicated that the newspaper has high readership in terms of both time and types of items. Although it has its highest readership among the elderly, most of whom have lived in the community for many years, its overall level of readership is also high--at least comparable to that of commercial weekly newspapers and urban neighborhood newspapers as shown in previous studies. These results suggest that a volunteer newspaper may be a viable model for meeting the communication needs of persons living in communities too small for a commercial newspaper. (Seven tables of data are included, and 17 references are appended.) (MS)

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The Volunteer Newspaper: A Communication Solution for Small Rural Communities? A Case Study

Eric A. Abbott
Professor
Journalism and Mass Communication
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011
515-294-0492

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The Volunteer Newspaper: A Communication Solution for Small Rural Communities? A Case Study

A number of studies have demonstrated over the years that the rural weekly newspaper provides a substantial dose of the social glue that holds small communities together. Byerly's 1961 study noted that a weekly newspaper "serves as the unifying force for the community" (Byerly, 1961). Willey concluded that the weekly newspaper has a key role in fostering a sense of community identity and unity (Willey, 1926). Timbs (1982) reported on a number of studies showing an "intimacy" that has developed between the weekly and its audience. Greenberg (1964) noted that the same functions apply for urban community weeklies. Schramm and Ludwig, in their classic 1951 snythesis of 24 studies of midwest weeklies, found that the weekly was "a window for . . the whole county" (Schramm and Ludwig, 1951). Schramm attempted to interview weekly residents who had moved away to see if they missed the paper. He found very few who were not still receiving it. Barnhart (1949) reported a similar trend.

Despite their important role in the community, there have been a number of economic cycles and population shifts which have resulted in communities losing their newspapers. Byerly noted that the number of weekly newspapers has declined because of: (1) Cessation in smaller communities (especially under 1,000 in population; and (2) Consolidation of competing papers (Byerly, 1961, p 11). In central Montana, the decline began when the flow of homesteaders stopped. Newspapers folded in 14 communities, all under 500 in population. In Missouri, the number of weeklies in towns of 200 or less was 28 in 1910 and two in 1960. In towns of less than 1,000, the number of weeklies declined from 345 in 1910 to 105 in 1960, a decrease of 69.6 percent (Byerly, 1961, p. 12). ANPA figures show the number of weeklies has dropped only 6.4 percent from 1965 (8,061) to 1984 (7,547). However, an increase in urban weeklies has masked the loss of papers in rural areas. As the population in rural Iowa has shifted

toward more urbanized areas in the past 30 years, a number of communities have lost the economic base needed to support a commercial newsgpaper. As Meredith observed in 1937, "The country weekly is sewed up to the fortunes and destinies of the community in which it is published. It will live just as long as the country town lives. . " (Meredith, 1937) In this he was correct. Unfortunately, he went on to add, " and the country town will never die."

Some segments of the population have an especially strong attachment to and need for weeklies. Edelstein and Larsen concluded that "the newspaper proved more important to some members of the social structure than to others. Older persons, women and the heads of large families felt that the newspaper was most important. In contrast, those of high economic and educational status tended to move away from 'local' orientation to a more sophisticated 'cosmopolitan' identification with the larger, metropolitan community" (Edelstein and Larsen, 1960, p. 497).

Thus, the needs in rural communities for local news and social news do not terminate just because the local business community is no longer capable of supporting a commercial newspaper. Since most rural communities are likely to contain above-average proportions of the old and the less educated, the need for a newspaper would be expected to be very great.

Since 1960, there has been increasing interest in the general problem of newspapers for disadvantaged communities or populations. Government programs or community development efforts have supported Neighborhood Newspapers in urban communities. Gaziano (1974, 1984) reported on studies of Neighborhood papers in Cleveland, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Boston and New York City. She noted that these Neighborhood Newspapers generally had:

1. Non-profit status;
2. Volunteer or low-paid staffs;
3. Circulation on the basis of neighborhood residence rather than advertiser-oriented

or economic bases.
4. Free circulation

In addition, she found that neighborhood newspaper boards and staffs may be affiliated with, or at least in communication with, many other neighborhood organizations and institutions.

Although rural audiences in small towns suffer from the same media neglect as urban ghetto populations, they have been largely ignored by government development efforts, economists (who often recommend against spending funds to assist "non-viable" communities), and communication researchers. Klaus (1981), in a study of Iowa weeklies, found that not much has been written about them, despite the fact that their total circulation in the state was nearly a million readers. Albertson (1985) found that rural weeklies receive little institutional support from the press, trade organizations, or communication researchers compared to dailies or the suburban weekly press.

This paper reports on the results of an exploratory case study of a small Iowa community of 450 persons which launched a volunteer newspaper nearly 10 years ago. The town's experience is seen as a possible model for other small communities which desire a newspaper, but are too small to support a commercial weekly newspaper.

The study was divided into two main parts. The first, accomplished by a series of interviews with persons instrumental in creating and operating the volunteer newspaper, was aimed at explaining how the newspaper came into existence and how it has survived its first decade. Of specific interest were the questions of staff recruitment and training, support in times of staff transition or financial crisis, and ways in which the business of the paper is handled.

The second part consisted of a mail survey of all 427 subscribers to the volunteer newspaper. Extent of readership of the paper, reader identification

with it, and views about its role in the community were explored.

The research was carried out as part of a graduate research methodology class in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Iowa State University in March-May, 1987. Questionnaire design and survey integrity were supervised by the Department's research center, which coded responses and cleaned the data.

The Launching of a Volunteer Newspaper

To address the first part of the project, Yin's (1984) case study method was followed, supplemented by Felstehausen's (1975) Problem Targeting Technique. A list of community leaders and others known to have been involved in the creation and operation of the volunteer newspaper was drawn up. Lines of questions were developed after initial visits to the community to explain the history of the paper, and how it has overcome problems in a number of areas since its creation. A two-person team of graduate students was assigned to each person on the list. They began with a basic set of questions. However, as the interviews proceeded and new information and insights emerged, the teams met and added questions to address the new areas. Thus, the last interview reflected the benefits of previous questioning. In some cases, it was necessary to return to those questioned previously to ask about new information. In addition to asking each person about the paper, each respondent was also asked to identify a person in the community "who might disagree with them, or who might shed light on a different aspect of the paper's development" (see Felstehausen, 1975) That person was then added to the interview list. Soon, persons were naming only those who were already on the list, which completed the process.

Feltsehausen noted that in this situation, the goal of the interviewing is to collect as many different perspectives on the development of the paper as possible. In this way, one accepts the fact that each participant may view

developments from a different -- yet important -- perspective. In some areas, consensus was found (for example, the date of the first issue, and a list of persons responsible for that issue). In others, there were differing views (for example, the question of who the first person was to suggest the idea of a volunteer newspaper was never resolved.) The benefit of the approach is the ability to see history in its complexity, rather than trying to assemble one version of historical truth. The results of this project phase will now be briefly considered.

In 1977, a non-profit community development organization, the Chicago-based Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), selected Lorimor as a site for its community development activities, and a small group of ICA volunteers came to live in Lorimor. One of their early activities in the community was to assemble both town and area residents at a series of meetings to discuss what could be done to help the town. At the time, the community was declining. There had been a local commercial newspaper in Lorimor, but it folded in the early 1960s. Many businesses on main street had closed down. The population was not increasing, and there was a concentration of retired persons in the community. Junk littered vacant lots and the local city park was not being maintained.

At the meetings June 18-24, 1978, those attending were divided into five working groups. Each group was assigned the task of coming up with ideas for community improvement. In addition, each group was to come up with a "miracle," one improvement which they could carry out immediately. For one of the groups, the "miracle" was to start a newspaper, and the first issue was published that week with publication costs underwritten by the ICA. An ICA volunteer envisioned an offset paper paid for in part by advertising, and in part by a job-printing service that would develop along with the paper. Her vision also called for a paid editor/job printer. The community businesses supported the idea of advertising. However, there was a strong desire that whatever happened,

the paper should be a local product and printed locally. Thus, offset printing was ruled out, and a used mimeograph machine was purchased instead. Initially, the ICA volunteer served as editor. When she stepped down, the community decided to recruit a volunteer editor. Since that time, there have been three different editorial teams -- all volunteer -- which have put out the paper. This typically involves between 20-30 hours of work per week gathering information and typing it on mimeograph stencils. Each advertisement or headline is hand-drawn on stencils each week.

Other important aspects of the functioning of the paper include:

1. Overall financial and organizational support for the paper is provided by a town community development group known as the Lorimor Boosters. This organization ostensibly includes all residents of Lorimor, but in fact consists of an active group of business leaders and local residents. This group helped establish a local community building, which now houses the newspaper office. It also obtains funds for purchases such as paper, ink, and new equipment. Because of the organization's support, there is continuity from one editor to the next. This also frees the editor from some of the burden of fund-raising activities.

2. The newspaper's management style is "crisis-oriented." There is little advance planning for the newspaper, and no funds allocated specifically to it other than its advertising revenue and $6 per year for subscribers who live outside the Lorimor trade area. When the old mimeograph machine broke down during the interview period, an emergency meeting of the Boosters was held to discuss the possibilities. When a Des Moines firm found another used mimeograph machine and offered it as a replacement, the newspaper had no money to buy it. Instead, the company provided the machine, and the Boosters incurred the liability for it. Notices went up around the community that funds were being sought. A similar approach was used when a typewriter broke. When one co-editor

quit to take a job in Des Moines, several crisis meetings were held to search for a replacement who could both type and report.

3. Local production and control is a vital concern of the editors. This is best exemplified by the editors' response to the possibility of offset printing. Offset would mean not having to hand-draw each ad on a stencil each week, the possibility of using photos, and a better looking overall product. However, there is no offset press in the community, so this change would mean printing the paper elsewhere. Both editors were adamant that the ability to control the product all the way through and produce a truly local paper was the important guiding principle, which outweighed the advantages of offset. The editors' view on this matter is not universally shared in the community. Several of those interviewed, including a local clergyman who writes a column for the paper, favor a printing method that could permit photographs.

4. There have been spread effects for the community because of the paper. When the community's centennial celebration was held in June, 1987, the paper's staff was pressed into service to produce handbills, programs, letterhead, and other printed promotional materials.

5. Although it is difficult to document the impact of the paper on local businesses, virtually all local retail businesses advertise in the paper regularly. The slight decline in advertising revenue that has occurred during the paper's life has been due to the closing of businesses, not withdrawing advertising. Advertisers saw the paper as a business opportunity to increase sales, yet it was difficult to separate their commercial interests from their overall support for the community. Clearly, the continued existence of the community is vital to their economic success.

6. There were a wide diversity of opinions expressed about what the paper should include and how it should be written. Some community leaders were critical of the style of writing in the paper (grammatical errors and other

mistakes). Others were not concerned with the style, but criticized the coverage (not enough social news, too many boilerplate news releases from local schools, community colleges and congressmen). These criticisms were virtually never reported to the editors. Most leaders felt that since the editors were volunteering their time, they should not be criticized in the same way that a paid editor would be. In addition, they were anxious to avoid any open rifts that might result in community tension or in the editors quitting. Despite the differing views about what the paper should contain, those interviewed were unanimous in believing that the paper was making a positive contribution to the community.

7. The editors of the paper at present, and previous editors, have never received any journalistic training. They tend to use copy submitted by others largely as it is, and they do very little feature or enterprise reporting. There are no journalistic reference books of any kind. Although priority local news is usually reserved for page 1, the staff has no method for copyfitting. None of the staff had any idea what libel was, although they were very attuned to not offending anyone in the community by the newspaper's content. What the editors did bring to their job was a detailed knowledge of the community itself, a desire to improve the community, and basic typing and writing skills. Methods of newsgathering have varied with the editors. The first editor organized correspondents in each area of the community, who were expected to generate news for each issue. The current editors have not maintained that system, but regularly visit locations where social and other news is likely to be generated, such as "Meals on Wheels" where senior citizens gather to eat, school activities, and community meetings.

8. The community leaders and staff are eager to take advantage of legal opportunities the paper offers, but often lack knowledge and skill in this area.

The first newspaper editor (from the ICA) applied for and received a second class mailing permit for the Lorimorian. This greatly reduced mailing costs. However, after that editor departed the community, the second class permit lapsed, and the newspaper was forced to pay first class rates until a new application was processed. The community also applied for permission to use the Lorimorian as the official newspaper for legal notices. This has provided a predictable source of revenue for the paper and saturation coverage of the community. However, it has angered nearby commercial newspapers which previously carried the legal notices, and it has created a dilemma about whether or not to charge local residents for the paper. A certain percentage of local citizens (larger than that for competing papers) must receive the paper or its legal status would be jeopardized.

Readership Survey Results

All 427 households receiving the Lorimorian were surveyed by mail using the Dillman method of an initial mailing, a reminder postcard about 10 days later, and a final full mailing two weeks after the postcard. Lorimorian staff assisted in preparing the mailing list, by deleting business establishments and those residing in nursing homes. No attempt was made to address a particular individual at each home, since no list existed other than the principal subscriber, who was often the male head of household. Procedures followed guidelines for interviewing Human Subjects developed at Iowa State University.

Preliminary analysis of the survey data focused on four specific objectives:

1. To describe in general the demographics of readers of the Lorimorian;

2. To compare readership patterns of the Lorimorian volunteer paper with those of past readership studies of rural weekly newspapers. Schramm and Ludwig's classic study of 24 weekly newspapers reported in 1951 was used as a

benchmark for comparison. It was expected that although this is a volunteer newspaper, it will have a pattern of readership similar to commercial weekly papers.

3. Since previous studies have shown that the elderly are more dependent on print media, especially newspapers, than other groups, age comparisons were made for items read, contributing to the paper, and other measures of involvement with the paper. It was expected that the elderly would be more strongly connected to the paper, read more of it, and would miss it more than younger readers.

4. Although it is commonly found that those who have lived in a rural community continue to subscribe to a paper even after moving away from town, little study has been made of differences in reading habits between continuing residents and former residents. It is expected that differences would be likely to emerge, particularly on day-to-day community events, with former residents being more interested in social news that they could not get from any other source, and less interested in city council activities.

Demographic Results

A total of 261 households -- or 61.1 percent -- returned a useable questionnaire. Of those, 60 percent were female, and 40 percent were male. The mean age was 57.6, and half of those responding who are current residents of Lorimor have lived in the community 45 years or longer. More than half of all Lorimor area respondents say they expect to live in the area for the rest of their lives. A total of 28.6 percent of those living in or within 10 miles of Lorimor are retired, while another 42.2 percent work outside the home. The remainder said they work at home. Of the respondents, 30 percent live in Lorimor itself, and another 45 percent live within 10 miles of the community. Another 8.5 percent live in one of three counties near Lorimor, and 5.7 percent

more live in Iowa. The final 10 percent live outside the state. Of those who do not reside in the community or within 10 miles of it, 79.7 percent have lived in Lorimor.

Thus, the audience for the paper -- especially the audience living in or within 10 miles of town -- could be characterized as predominately elderly, long term residents, and stable in terms of their expectation of continuing to remain a resident of Lorimor. Most are living or have lived in the community.

Only two of the 261 respondents said they did not receive the New Lorimorian newspaper. Only one respondent said he or she did not spend at least some time reading the paper each week. More than three-fourths said someone else in the household also read the paper.

Comparisons with Previous Weekly Readership Studies

Because many free circulation newspapers have readership patterns substantially below that of paid circulation dailies or weeklies (Bogart, 1981 p. 38), it is important to compare readership of the Lorimor volunteer newspaper with readership data from other weekly newspapers. It was the expectation of the research team that despite its free circulation pattern, it would be read with an intensity similar to that of a paid commercial weekly.

In 1951, Wilbur Schramm and Merritt Ludwig published a synthesis of 24 studies of weekly newspapers, four of which were from Iowa (Schramm and Ludwig, 1951). Many others were from surrounding states. They documented a rather consistent and enduring pattern of readership among rural residents. Comparisons are difficult because the exact methodologies used to determine readership were not clear in the synthesis, and undoubtedly varied within the 24 studies. In the current study, respondents were asked to indicate whether or

not they always, sometimes, or never read certain types of news. Results are presented so that rough comparisons can be made with Schramm's findings (See Table 1 at end of paper).

These results show that readership of the Lorimor newspaper in general is high, and although exact comparisons with the Schramm and Ludwig study are not possible, one might conclude that this volunteer newspaper's readership is at least as high as a commercial weekly, and perhaps higher. Schramm and Ludwig found that smaller weeklies (990-1877 circulation) had mean readership figures 13 percent higher (44% to 31%) than larger weeklies in their study. Whether or not a circulation of 427 would be expected to be even higher is unclear. Schramm and Ludwig concluded that " . . . the smaller the community the more likely it is to be homogenous, the more likely readers are to be interested in all the local news, and therefore the greater the intensity of readership."

To provide a rough comparison between Schramm and Ludwig's findings and the Lorimor volunteer newspaper, an overall mean score for the Lorimor results was computed. "Always Read" was accepted as the only indicator of likelihood of reading a story. "Sometimes" and "Never" were not accepted. For each type of article or advertisement, a "1" was awarded if the person said "always read;" otherwise the score was zero. Scores across 16 items were then added, showing a mean of 9.18. When divided by 16, this yields a mean readership score of 57.4 percent, which is above those reported by Schramm and Ludwig. Interpretation is difficult since different measures were used, but this seems to support the idea of an intensity of readership that is at least as good and perhaps better than larger commercial weeklies.

Schramm and Ludwig also found significant differences between men and women in their readership of different types of stories. They reported much higher readership by women for human interest, society and personals, and much higher readership for men for sports news. To compare these findings with the Lorimor

volunteer newspaper findings, reported readership of each type of news or advertising appearing in the paper was compared by sex. Results (see Table 7) show trends similar to those reported by Schramm and Ludwig, but only one instance where the difference was statistically significant. That involved readership of hospital news. Women had slightly more readership reported for letters to the editor, births and deaths, and news of events in town. Men led for city council news, congressman news releases, organization notices, coming events calendar, classified ads, and school news. Sports was not a category in the Lorimor paper, so could not be compared with the Schramm and Ludwig findings.

Because of the high reported readership of the New Lorimorian among both men and women, it was concluded that this volunteer newspaper was more similar to commercial newspapers in its readership patterns than to shoppers or other free papers. That is, its volunteer status did not seem to affect readership negatively. Gaziano (1974) found that for a government-subsidized community paper, readership figures were also high, with 66 percent of those surveyed saying they read the paper, which was 90 percent of those who reported receiving it. (In the present study, more than 99 percent of respondents reporting spending some time with the paper each week).

Age and Involvement with a Volunteer Newspaper

Because Edelstein and Larsen emphasized the important role local weekly newspapers have for the elderly, the study examined how the New Lorimorian was able to serve the needs of its elderly readers. This is an especially important aspect to investigate since small midwestern rural communities tend to have high proportions of the elderly living in them. Iowa is second only to Florida in its percentage of the elderly.

The variable age in this study stands not only for chronological time, but also for extent of experience in the community. Since the great majority of elderly residents have lived their entire lives in Lorimor, age might be expected to be strongly associated with a number of measurements of readership, attachment and time spent.

Several variables were compared with age. The first was a readership score derived from adding responses for the 16 types of news and advertising in the paper (see Table 2). For each, the respondent could answer "Never Read" (score 1), "Sometimes" (score 2) or "Always Read" (score 3). Thus, a high score indicates more active and frequent reading. Scores ranged from a low of 18 to a high of 48, with 16 persons indicating they "always read" every type of news.

A second variable was a measure of personal involvement with the paper. Respondents were asked whether or not they had ever contributed an item to the paper. Two-thirds said they had. Response choices were "Never" (score 0), "more than a year ago" (score 1), "in the past year" (score 2), "in the past three months" (score 3), "in the past month" (score 4), and "each week" (score 5).

A third variable concerned whether or not the respondent or his/her family had been mentioned in the Lorimorian. Response choices were "Never" (score 1), "Yes, but more than a year ago (score 2), "Yes, in the past year" (score 3), "Yes, in the past three months (score 4), and "Yes in the past month" (score 5).

The fourth variable examined the total time devoted by the respondent to reading the Lorimor paper in an average week. Response choices were scored in a similar way to those preceding, with 1 point for those who said they did not spend any time with the paper to 6 for those who said they spent more than an hour per issue with it.

Pearson correlation was then used to examine relationships among these variables and to compare them to age of respondents. Results are shown in Table

2. The results indicate a significant and positive relationship between age and total time devoted to reading the paper, and a significant positive relationship between age and intensity of readership. However, no relationship was found between age and contributing an article to the paper or being mentioned in it. Many studies have shown that older people spend more time with both daily and weekly newspapers, perhaps because of more available time, but also because of poorer eyesight and other infirmities (Bogart, 1981). However, in the Lorimor case, the strong correlation between readership of any item and age suggests more interest and attention by those long-term residents of the town.

An item-by-item analysis of age by the likelihood of reading each of 16 types of news showed that older readers were significantly more likely to read eight of them: Centennial news, congressman news releases, church notices, organization news, news of events in Lorimor, neighborhood news, births and deaths, and hospital notes. They were not significantly different from younger readers for city council news, the coming events calendar, letters to the editor, editorials, advertisements, classified ads, school menus, or community college news. In only two cases were the percentages of "always reads" lower for the older group than the younger -- classified ads and school lunch menus. These results show that the paper is an important source of information for the elderly about what their friends are doing, and for certain types of news. It is less important for advertising and school activities. A summary of these results is shown in Table 3.

An analysis was also done to compare attitudes about the paper by age. Crosstabulations with 10 attitudinal items compared for age were computed. The attitudinal items consisted of three items about Lorimor itself, and seven specifically about the volunteer newspaper. For example, respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) how they

felt about such statements as: "I have real roots in Lorimor" (sig. p .05) "I sometimes feel like an outsider in Lorimor," (sig. .02) "I don't really like living in Lorimor" (not sig.). Results for these three items showed that the elderly are more likely to have roots, and less likely to feel like an outsider. Few in any group said they didn't really like living in Lorimor. (A summary of results is shown in Table 4).

For items specifically about the volunteer newspaper, respondents were asked to indicate on the same scale: "The New Lorimorian is not interesting for most people in town," (not sig.), "I get a lot out of each issue of the New Lorimorian," (not sig.), "The New Lorimorian helps raise community spirit" (not sig.), "I don't feel the New Lorimorian is relevant to me" (not sig.), "The New Lorimorian really helps tie people in Lorimor together as a community" (sig. p .01), I" would really miss the New Lorimorian if it stopped being published" (not sig.). These results show that in six out of seven cases, the elderly are not different from others in their attitudes about the paper. Attitudes overall were very positive from all groups. For example, on the last item, 89 percent of those 65-90 agreed that they would miss the paper, compared with 80 percent of those 40-64 and 76 percent of those 20-39.

Effects of Years of Residence on Readership

Since years of experience living in Lorimor were expected to have an effect on readership patterns, an analysis was made of the effect of living in Lorimor on these patterns. Respondents who now live in or near Lorimor were divided into two groups -- those with less than 10 years of experience living in town, and those with more than 10. Both groups were then compared on their contribution of news to the paper, mentions of themselves in the paper, time spent reading the paper, and the same attitudinal items discussed above for age.

Results showed that while short-term residents were just as likely to have contributed an item to the paper, they reported that they were less likely to be mentioned in the paper. There was no difference between the two groups on time spent reading the paper.

Short-term residents were significantly less likely to think they had "real roots in Lorimor," and half of them agreed with the statement "I sometimes feel like an outsider in Lorimor." However, there was no difference between short-term and long-term residents in their attitudes about the paper. Both groups disagreed with a statement that the New Lorimorian "is not interesting for most people in town," and both agreed they "get a lot out of each issue." Long-term residents were more likely to agree that the paper did more to raise community spirit, and that it ties people in the community together. And long-term residents would miss the paper more if it ceased publication. Eighty-six percent of the long-term residents said they would miss it, compared to 58 percent of those who had lived in the area less than 10 years. A summary of these results is shown in Table 5.

Several conclusions are possible from this analysis. First, this volunteer paper does receive more loyalty from those living in the community the longest. They would miss it more, and they believe it does more to tie the community together. However, the paper is still supported by many of the shorter term residents. More than half of them said they would miss the paper if it were not published. And they often agreed with longer term residents that they get a lot out of each issue, and that it is interesting. Thus, the volunteer paper does seem to be serving both groups.

Distance Subscribers Compared to Town Residents

Unlike daily newspapers, Schramm and Ludwig, plus Allen (1928) have noted that commercial weekly newspapers tend to serve both people currently living in

a community and those who grew up there and then moved elsewhere. Since this is an important potential audience for a volunteer newspaper, an analysis was carried out comparing readership and involvement with the paper for persons living in town, near town, or those who had moved further away. Seventy-nine percent of those not living in or near Lorimor had lived in the Lorimor area at some time during their lives.

To investigate these differences, the response to an item asking about where they live was scored, with a "1" for those living in Lorimor, a "2" for those living within 10 miles of Lorimor, a "3" for those living in one of three counties near Lorimor, a "4" for those living in Iowa, and a "5" for out-of-state subscribers.

Correlational relationships are shown in Table 2. Results show those not living in Lorimor are less likely to contribute items to the paper. However, they are different in no other single respect from those living closer to town.

A crosstablulation was done to examine readership of specific items in the paper by place of residence. Results of the crosstabulations are shown in Table 6. In 9 of 16 cases, there was no difference in readership for items. In the remaining seven, town residents were more likely to "always" read something than were area residents or those living some distance from town. In most cases, readership declined as one moved away from the town. However, for news of the community's Centennial Celebration, readership was higher among those living far away than it was for those living within 10 miles of town.

It should be noted that distance readers must pay $6 a year to receive the paper, while local and area residents get it free. That could result in more interest by those willing to pay. The largest percentage difference in readership was for advertisements, with 67 percent of local residents reporting they "always" read ads while only 38 percent of distance subscribers said the

same. For city council news, 79 percent of local residents said they "always" read it, while 46 percent of area residents did and 56 percent of distance readers did.

Although those living further from Lorimor do read the paper with less intensity for some items, overall, one might still conclude that there is substantial readership of the paper by all three groups. The expectation that groups living further away from the community would read more intensively because they were more dependent on the volunteer newspaper for information was not supported, with the possible exception of Centennial news. It appears that those closest to the town read the most, even though they have other likely sources of the same information.

Conclusions and Implications

An exploratory study of this type cannot be conclusive in its findings. Its value lies in its ability to paint a broad picture of what is happening, and to point to specific areas or variables which are likely to be important.

Results of this single case study of a volunteer newspaper indicate that it has high readership in terms of both time and types of items. Although it has highest readership among the elderly, most of whom have lived in the community many years, its overall level of readership is also high -- at least comparable to studies of commercial weekly newspapers and urban neighborhood newspapers. Thus, the conclusion seems warranted that a volunteer newspaper may be a viable model for meeting the communication needs of persons living in communities too small for a commercial newspaper.

One must immediately add several qualifiers based on this research. In many areas, nearby commercial newspapers are able to fulfill the communication needs of small communities either through correspondence columns, special pages, or different editions. In this particular case, Lorimor is located 30 miles from its county seat, the location of the nearest daily, and 50 miles from Des

Moines. The community is also located near the corner of its county -- somewhat removed from other county communities. It is equidistant from several trade areas -- Winterset to the north, and Afton to the southwest -- which makes it less desirable from the point of advertisers. Thus, the geographic location of Lorimor may have uniquely suited it for a volunteer paper.

Second, a volunteer newspaper must be supported by a community infrastructure of some kind. In Lorimor, this was provided as part of the ICA project beginning in the late 1970s. The Lorimor Boosters have helped the paper survive a number of financial and personnel crises during its 10 years of life. Since not all communities have such an infrastructure, this should be seen as an important variable.

Third, a proper staff is absolutely essential to the functioning of a volunteer newspaper. While it is unlikely that one would find a person in a small community who has been trained as a journalist, the author considers this barrier to be less important than others cited for several reasons. There is almost always someone in the community who can write and type, and whose talents are not being fully utilized in the community. These persons, in some cases with no training, can create and publish a volunteer newspaper. However, training could help them to greatly improve the product.

Fourth, communities in which the population is relatively stable over time are better-suited to production of a long-term volunteer newspaper. Longer term residents are more likely to recognize the need for a newspaper, and read it more avidly than those who have been in the community a shorter time. Thus, a transitional community might be less appropriate.

Fifth, communities with an elderly population may find voluntary newspapers more useful than other communities. One reason for this is because they have more of a sense of history about the community, including knowledge of other

persons and events, such as a centennial celebration. A second reason, as has been pointed out by other studies, is that the elderly rely more on print media. Whether by tradition or lack of other alternatives, studies have shown the elderly to be more loyal readers of newspapers.

The analysis presented in this paper is preliminary in nature, and represents the first stage in a multi-step planned sequence. Additional analysis, for example, is planned concerning the relationship between membership in community organizations and involvement with the volunteer newspaper. Another piece of analysis will examine the volunteer newspaper in the context of other media behavior. Lorimor residents have a variety of ways of learning about local events. Those living increasingly far from the community have fewer channels. Thus, they may show more dependence on the newspaper for information, even though their readership of certain items may be lower.

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Table 1: Comparison of Commercial Weekly Newspaper Reading with that of a Volunteer Newspaper

Commercial Weekly		Volunteer Newspaper				
Category of News	Mean % Readership	Category of News	Always Read	Sometimes	Never	Missing
1. General News	45.3%	1A. City Council	55.2%	36.4%	3.4%	4.9%
		1B. Centennial News	73.6	21.5	.8	4.2
		1C. Lorimor News	84.3	10.7	.4	4.5
		1D. School Menus	24.5	34.9	28.4	12.2
		1E. Congressman PR	15.3	43.3	31.8	9.5
2. Local Display Ads	26.3	2. Local Display Ad	51.3	40.2	1.9	6.5
3. Local Classifieds	61.3	3. Local Classified	56.3	32.2	2.7	8.8
4A. Society News	37.9	4A. Neighborhood	76.6	17.2	2.7	3.4
4B. Correspondence	31.3	4B. Births/Deaths	81.2	12.3	1.5	4.9
5. Local Editorials	38.3	5. Local Editorials	62.8	25.3	3.4	8.4

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Between Age and other Readership Variables

Variable	Age	Read Intensity	Contribute	Mention	Time Read	Residence
Age	----					
Readership Intensity	.2816**	----				
Contribute to Paper	.0248	.2352**	----			
Mentioned in Paper	-.0191	.0940	.4488**	----		
Time Reading	.4083**	.2623	.0117	-.0973	----	
Residence Location	.1526	-.1218	-.2744**	-.0864	.0743	-----

** significance at the .001 level, 2-tail test.

Table 3
Summary Results of Crosstabulation X^2 Tests of Age by Readership of 16 News Types

Type of News	Result of X^2 test
1. Council News	No. Sig. Difference
2. Centennial News	(p.=l.t. .001) Elderly Read More
3. Congressman PR	(p.=l.t. .01) Elderly Read More
4. Church News	(p.=l.t. .001) Elderly Read More
5. Organization News	(p.=l.t. .01) Elderly Read More
6. Coming Events Calendar	No Sig. Difference
7. News of Lorimor Events	(p.=l.t. .05) Elderly Read More
8. Neighborhood News	(p.=l.t. .0001) Elderly Read Much More
9. Births/Deaths/Birthdays	(p.=l.t. .001) Elderly Read More
10.Hospital Notes	(p.=l.t. .002) Elderly Read More
11.Letters to Editor	No Sig. Difference
12.Editorials	No Sig. Difference
13.Advertisements	No Sig. Difference
14.Classified Ads	No Sig. Difference
15.School Menus	No Sig. Difference
16.SW Community College PR	No Sig. Difference

Age was divided into three groups: (1) 20-39; (2) 40-64; (3) 65 and over. Readership categories were always, sometimes and never. In some cases, never was merged with sometimes when the 'n' was too low.

Table 4
Summary Results of Crosstabulation X^2 Tests of Age by 10 Attitudinal Items

Attitudinal Item	Results of X^2 Test
Items about Lorimor	
1. Have real roots in Lorimor	($p<.05$) Elderly Agree More
2. Feel like an outsider in Lorimor	($p<.02$) Elderly Disagree More
3. Don't really like living in Lorimor	No Sig. Difference
Items about the Paper	
4. Paper is not interesting for most people	No Sig. Difference
5. I get a lot out of each issue	No Sig. Difference
6. Paper helps raise community spirit	No Sig. Difference
7. Paper is not relevant to me	No Sig. Difference
8. Paper helps tie people together	($p<.01$) Elderly Agree More
9. Paper doesn't do much for town	No Sig. Difference
10. I would really miss the paper if it ceased	No Sig. Difference

Table 5
Summary Results of Crosstabulation X^2 Tests
of Time of Residence by Involvement/Attitudinal Items

Involvement Items	Results of X^2 Tests
1. Contribute News to Paper	No Sig. Differences
2. Mentioned in Paper	(P<.05) Shorter term residents think they are mentioned less.
3. Time spent reading paper	No Sig. Differences
Attitudinal Items About Lorimor	
4. Have real roots in Lorimor	(P<.001) Long term, 64% agree; short term, 19% agree.
5. Don't like living in Lorimor	No Sig. Differences
6. Feel like an outsider in Lorimor	(P<.01) Short term, 50% agree; long term, 20% agree.
Attitudinal Items About the Paper	
7. Lorimorian not interesting	No Sig. Differences
8. Get a lot out of each issue	No Sig. Differences
9. Paper helps raise community spirit	(P<.01) Long term, 79% agree; short term, 58% agree.
10. Lorimorian not relevant to me	No Sig. Differences
11. Paper ties people together	(P<.02) Long term, 69% agree; short term, 42% agree.
12. Paper doesn't do much for town	No Sig. Differences
13. I would really miss the paper if it ceased publication	(P<.01) Long term, 86% agree; short term, 58% agree.

Table 6
Summary Results for Crosstabulation X^2 Tests
of Place of Residence by Readership of 16 News Types

News Types	Results of X_2 Analysis
1. Council News	(p<.0001) Lorimor residents read more
2. Centennial News	(p<.05) Lorimor and most distant residents most likely to read.
3. Congressman PR	No Sig. Differences
4. Church Notices	(P<.01) Lorimor residents read more
5. Organization news	(p<.05) Lorimor residents read more
6. Events Calendar	No Sig. Differences
7. News of Lorimor	(p<.02) Lorimor residents always read this 95% of time; distant residents read it 89%; Lorimor area residents read it 83% of the time.
8. Neighborhood news	No Sig. Differences
9. Births/Deaths/Birthdays	No Sig. Differences
10.Hospital News	No Sig. Differences
11.Letters	No Sig. Differences
12.Editorials	No Sig. Differences
13.Advertisements	(p<.003) Readership declines as one lives further away from town.
14.Classified Ads	(P<.01) Same trend as for advertisements
15.School Menus	No Sig. Differences (readership is low for all)
16.SW Community College PR	No Sig. Differences

Table 7
Summary Results of Crosstabulation X^2 Tests of Sex by Readership of 16 News Types

News Type	Results of X^2 Test
1. Council News	No Sig. Differences
2. Centennial News	No Sig. Differences
3. Congressman PR	No Sig. Differences
4. Church Notices	No Sig. Differences
5. Organization Notes	No Sig. Differences
6. Coming Events Calendar	No Sig. Differences
7. News of Lorimor Events	No Sig. Differences
8. Neighborhood News	No Sig. Differences
9. Births/Deaths/Birthdays	No Sig. Differences
10.Hospital Notes	(P<.05) Women Read More
11.Letters to Editor	No Sig. Differences
12.Editorials	No Sig. Differences
13.Advertisements	No Sig. Differences
14.Classified Ads	No Sig. Differences
15.School Menus	No Sig. Differences
16.SW Community College PR	No Sig. Differences

Readership intensity was determined by measuring, for each item, "always read," "sometimes read," or "never read."